

March/April 2014

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Dry Lake Valley North Solar Energy Zone: The BLM Ely District, Caliente Field Office is asking the public to review and provide comment on a draft assessment of unavoidable impacts associated with the development of the 25,069-acre Dry Lake Valley North Solar Energy Zone (SEZ) in Lincoln County, Nev. The deadline to provide comment is **Friday, April 4, 2014.** *(See page 4 for more information)*

Medlin Modified Competitive Land Sale: The BLM Ely District, Caliente Field Office is scheduled at **1 p.m., Thursday, March 20, 2014**, to offer for sale to the public through a modified competitive sale one 40-acre parcel of agency-administered public land located about 20 miles southeast of Rachel in Lincoln County, Nev. The oral auction will be conducted at the BLM Caliente Field Office, 1400 South Front Street, in Caliente. Bidding will begin at the appraised fair market value of \$19,000. *(See page 9 for more information)*

Stonehouse Prescribed Burn: Weather conditions permitting, the BLM Ely District is scheduled between now and **Monday, March 31, 2014**, to burn about 500 acres of slash piles remaining from a pinion-juniper tree-thinning project near Lages Junction and Schellbourne Pass in the Schell Creek Range, about 70 miles north of Ely. *(See page 8 for more information)*

BLM Hiring Seasonal Firefighters: The BLM Ely District is accepting applications for temporary seasonal firefighters. Applications will be accepted through **Monday, March 31, 2014.** Applications must be submitted online at usajobs.gov, available through the following link: <http://www.firejobs.doi.gov>. *(See page 6 for more information)*

ELY RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Ely Resource Management Plan (RMP) is expected to undergo review as a result of a November 2012 Idaho District Court decision on a Western Watershed Project (WWP) challenge of 18 RMPs across six western states. The court examined as “test cases” the Pinedale and Craters of the Moon RMPs prepared by the BLM Pinedale and Twin Falls districts, in Wyoming and Idaho, respectively. The court ruled that BLM must amend the two RMPs to address identified deficiencies. The court dismissed challenges to two other RMPs, leaving 14 RMPs in place pending the outcome of the “test cases.” The Ely RMP is one of the 14 remaining RMPs.

Although the RMPs identify major factors in the loss of sagebrush habitat (including energy development and livestock use), WWP is questioning whether the challenged RMPs sufficiently address declining Greater Sage Grouse populations. WWP contends that the RMPs in question do not reference or follow guidance from the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, the BLM National Sage Grouse Strategy, BLM Special Status Species Policy and conservation assessments. The suit also contends

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that BLM did not consider/analyze alternatives calling for reduced or no livestock grazing, despite the fact that grazing was found to be a “major contributing factor” to the decline of sage grouse habitat.

WWP has also filed a motion to consolidate their appeal of the Ely RMP and their appeal of the Cave and Lake Valley Watershed Restoration Environmental Assessments to the Interior Board of Land Appeals (*see Watershed Analysis*).

The BLM Ely District has begun a scheduled five-year review of the Ely RMP, per the direction of the BLM Nevada State Office.

WATERSHED ANALYSIS

The Western Watershed Project (WWP) in December 2012 appealed the Cave and Lake Valley Watershed Restoration Environmental Assessment’s Decision Record for vegetation projects and Final Decision for range projects. A petition for stay regarding the range improvement decision was denied by Administrative Law Judge Robert Holt in February 2013. The petition for stay regarding vegetation treatments was denied because the Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA) did not rule within the allotted time period. In June 2013, WWP filed a complaint with Federal District Court, Idaho regarding the watershed plan.

The Ely District is preparing a watershed restoration plan for the South Spring and Hamblin Valley watersheds. A preliminary environmental assessment (EA) is expected to be released for public comment in spring 2014.

The BLM is evaluating comments received during the 45-day public comment period for the Newark and Huntington Watershed Restoration Plan and Environmental Assessment. The public comment period concluded in December 2013.

The BLM expects in 2014 to release for public review the proposed watershed restoration plans for Toquop Wash and Tule Desert, and Beaver Dam Wash.

Watershed analysis has been completed on the Cave Valley, Lake Valley, Antelope, North Antelope, Gleason Creek, North Spring Valley, Smith Valley, Steptoe A and South Steptoe watersheds.

The BLM Ely District, in collaboration with the USDA Agriculture Research Station and National Resource Conservation Service, is developing Ecological Site State and Transition Models for Major Land Resource Areas 28A and 28B, which will benefit watershed planning and grazing strategies, and vegetation treatments. Trainings are scheduled in spring 2014 to teach agency personnel and the public how to effectively use the models. The project is funded by the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act.

SAGE GROUSE PLANNING

The 90-day public comment period for the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service’s Draft Nevada and Northeastern California Sub-regional Greater Sage-grouse

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Land Use Plan Amendment and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DLUP/DEIS) closed January 29, 2014.

The DLUP/DEIS considers six possible management alternatives for maintaining and increasing habitat for Greater Sage-grouse on BLM and Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest lands in Nevada and Northeastern California. More than 17 million acres of Greater Sage-grouse habitat are managed by the BLM and Forest Service within the sub-regional area.

In March 2010, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service determined that listing the Greater Sage-grouse as a threatened or endangered species was “warranted, but precluded.” The FWS determined that current and potential threats to Greater Sage-grouse habitat and inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms pose “a significant threat to the Greater Sage-Grouse now and in the foreseeable future.”

The Nevada and Northeastern California Greater Sage-grouse EIS is one of 15 EISs that are being conducted as part of BLM’s and Forest Service’s west-wide National Greater Sage-Grouse planning effort, to provide additional measures to maintain and increase Greater Sage-grouse habitat on public lands to preclude the birds listing.

ENERGY

Natural Gas-fired Energy Development -

Toquop Energy Project: The BLM issued a Notice to Proceed to Toquop Energy, Inc., for a natural gas-fired power plant. Construction may begin once the proponent satisfies conditions outlined in the Notice. BLM is currently working on a right-of-way (ROW) application for project-related water development in the Tule Valley. The ROW is expected to be completed by June 2014.

The BLM issued rights-of-way (ROW) for a natural gas-fired plant in 2003. The following year, Toquop Energy, Inc. filed an application to amend the 2003 grant to allow for construction of a coal fired plant, instead. In January 2010, Toquop Energy, Inc. notified the BLM that the company intended to withdraw the application to amend the ROW and proceed with the gas-fired plant. Project partner Sithe Global withdrew from the project in August 2012. The new partner is EWP Renewable Corporation.

Toquop Energy, Inc. is simultaneously pursuing purchasing lands necessary to construct the plant and ancillary facilities. The Ely Resource Management Plan provides for the disposal of up to 640 acres for power plant development. The BLM will dispose of no more than 200 acres because of a conflict with the Western Wide Energy Corridor.

Wind Energy Development -

Ely Wind Mountain: Project proponent APEX Wind is developing a new Plan of Development for the Robinson Summit project area. The BLM expects to receive the

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document in March 2014. APEX in March 2011 purchased from Nevada Wind the monitoring rights-of-way for five project sites located in the Antelope, Cherry Creek, Schell Creek, Robinson Summit and North Egan mountain ranges. Nevada Wind is retaining five-percent of the project, which could be sold to another company. The right-of-way grants for the Schell Creek and North Egan project sites have expired. Processing of any new requests will be deferred until the sage grouse land use plan amendments are accomplished in fall 2014.

Hamblin Valley: The proponent will remove the Met towers this spring. The BLM expects the project to be closed following their removal.

Wilson Creek Wind Project: The BLM Ely District, Schell Field Office has rejected an application from Wilson Creek Wind Company, LLC, to develop a wind generation project on public lands about 20 miles northeast of Pioche, in Lincoln County, Nev. The BLM decision was appealed and the case is with the Interior Board of Land Appeals.

Spring Valley Wind: The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) is reviewing the first year of operation mortality data to analyze if the project is exceeding mortality thresholds and mitigation measures need to be implemented. The TAC provides advice and recommends to the BLM on the development and implementation of effective measures to monitor, avoid, minimize and mitigate impacts to avian and bat species.

Solar Energy Development -

The BLM Ely District, Caliente Field Office is asking the public to review and provide comment on a draft assessment of unavoidable impacts associated with the development of the 25,069-acre Dry Lake Valley North Solar Energy Zone (SEZ) in Lincoln County, Nev. The deadline to provide comment is **Friday, April 4, 2014**.

A public meeting is scheduled from **4 p.m. to 6:30 p.m., Tuesday, March 25**, at the BLM Caliente Field Office, 1400 South Front Street, in Caliente, Nev.

The assessment will help in the development of a regional mitigation strategy for the Dry Lake Valley North SEZ and is available at the BLM Caliente Field Office, 1400 South Front Street, Caliente; BLM Ely District Office, 702 North Industrial Way, Ely; and online at

http://www.blm.gov/nv/st/en/fo/ely_field_office/blm_programs/energy/dry_lake_valley_north/project_documents.html

The Dry Lake Valley North SEZ Regional Mitigation Strategy is expected to be completed in summer 2014 and will guide actions designed to compensate for the long-term loss of resource values in the SEZ.

Written comments may be submitted to the BLM Southern Nevada District Office, 4701 N. Torrey Pines Drive, Las Vegas, NV 89130 Attn: Michael Dwyer or via email to

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mdwyer@blm.gov. For more information, contact Michael Dwyer, BLM project manager, at (702) 515-5186 or mdwyer@blm.gov.

The 25,069-acre Dry Lake Valley North SEZ, located in north Dry Lake Valley about 45 miles northeast of Alamo, is one of five solar energy zones in Nevada. In all, there are 17 SEZ in six western states, Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico and Utah. If fully built, projects within the designated zones could produce as much as 23,700 megawatts of solar energy, sufficient to serve approximately 7 million homes. The SEZ program also provides for solar development on about 19 million acres outside the zones or within so-called “variance zones,” on a case-by-case basis. The program includes a framework for regional mitigation plans and excludes nearly 79-million acres of public lands deemed inappropriate for solar development to protect key natural and cultural resources.

Hydro Energy -

White Pine Pumped Storage Project: Gridflex Energy, LLC, in September 2013 submitted a preliminary permit application for the White Pine Pumped Storage Project facility. Gridflex and White Pine Water Power, LLC, are proposing through the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to construct a stored water pumping facility north of Ely, Nev. The proposed White Pine Pumped Storage Project would generate utilize three generators with 300 MW total capacity to generate 919,800 megawatt-hours, annually.

A permit is issued only to allow the permit holder to investigate the feasibility of the project while the permittee conducts investigations and secures necessary data to determine the feasibility of the proposed project and to prepare a license application. FERC has given the initial approvals to begin working with the BLM to develop a plan of development, begin the NEPA process, and develop natural resource and economic data. FERC will lead the project.

Electrical Transmission Development -

ON Line Project: The high-voltage One Nevada transmission line that connects NV Energy’s northern and southern electrical grids and provides for the transmission of renewable energy was formally dedicated in January 2014. The BLM and the applicant are in the final phases of reclamation.

Trans West Express Project: The BLM expects to make the final environmental impact statement available to the public in late 2014. The proposed 500 kilovolt electrical transmission line would extend from south-central Wyoming, through Colorado and Utah, to southern Nevada. The power line would enter Nevada through the southeast corner of Lincoln County. Three routes are proposed. The BLM Wyoming State Office is the lead office for the project.

The Zephyr Project: The BLM is scheduling public meetings and selecting a contractor to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) for the High Voltage Direct Current

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(HVDC) Electric Transmission Line Project that would originate in the Wheatland/Chugwater area of Wyoming and extend 950-plus miles to Eldorado Valley, south of Las Vegas. BLM Wyoming received the application and Plan of Development in March 2012.

FIRE

Fire Management –

BLM Hiring Seasonal Firefighters: The BLM Ely District is accepting applications for temporary seasonal firefighters. Applications will be accepted through Monday, March 31, 2014. Applications must be submitted online at usajobs.gov, available through the following link: <http://www.firejobs.doi.gov>. Applicants must be a U.S. citizen and 18 years of age at time of employment. Selected individuals are required to complete a physical examination and drug screening prior to employment and are subject to random drug testing during their time of service. Those in primary firefighting positions must also complete a “pack test” upon entering duty, which consists of hiking three miles over flat terrain in 45 minutes or less while carrying a 45-pound pack. For more information, contact Ely District Assistant Fire Management Officer Ray Maestes at (775) 289-1923, Fire Operations Supervisor Bill Panagopolous at (775) 289-1921, or Caliente Field Office Fire Operations Supervisor Ty Mizer at (775) 726-8112.

Fuels Reduction and Restoration –

Egan and Johnson Basins Restoration Project: The BLM is reviewing the public’s input on a proposed fuels reduction and habitat improvement project in Egan and Johnson basins, about 5 miles west of Cherry Creek, Nev. A preliminary environmental assessment is expected in May 2014. The proposed project would provide for vegetative diversity and improve habitat for wildlife, such as greater sage-grouse, as well as reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire by selectively thinning pinion-pine and juniper. Up to 50-percent of the approximately 14,000-acre project area would be treated using manual and mechanical treatment methods, and prescribed fire. The project is consistent with the BLM Ely District Resource Management Plan.

Duck Creek Basin Fuels Reduction and Habitat Improvement Project: The BLM is reviewing public input on a proposed fuels reduction and habitat improvement project in Duck Creek Basin, about 15 miles northeast of Ely, Nev. A preliminary environmental assessment is anticipated in summer 2014. The proposed project would provide for vegetative diversity and improve habitat for wildlife, such as greater sage-grouse, mule deer, and elk, as well as reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire by selectively thinning pinion-pine and juniper, and treating sagebrush communities. Up to 13,000 acres of the approximately 29,000-acre project area would be treated using manual and mechanical treatment methods, and prescribed fire. The project is consistent with the BLM Ely District Resource Management Plan.

OverlandPass/Big Wash: A preliminary environmental assessment is anticipated in April 2014. The project, which would be implemented in the Overland Pass area of the Ruby Mountains about 80 miles northwest of Ely, is a collaborative effort by the BLM Ely

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District, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, Ruby Mountain Ranger District; and Nevada Department of Wildlife. The project would provide for vegetative diversity and improve habitat for Greater sage-grouse, mule deer, elk and pronghorn antelope, as well as reduce the risk of catastrophic wildland fire by selectively thinning pinion-juniper from sagebrush communities. Approximately 17,000 acres of the 40,000-acre project area would be treated using prescribed fire, and manual and mechanical treatments.

Aspen and Sagebrush Steppe Joint Restoration Project with Great Basin National Park: Implementation began in November 2013. The collaborative project between the BLM and Great Basin National Park would restore about 1,000 acres of Aspen and sagebrush communities in and around Box Canyon and Kiou Basin, in White Pine County, Nev. It would combine prescribed fire use with mechanical treatments. Project funding comes from Round 11 of the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act.

Combs Creek: The White Pine County Wildlife Advisory Board has received funding through NDOW's heritage fund program and implementation is expected in June 2014. The project would be located in south Butte Valley, about 10 miles northwest of Ely, Nev., and would reduce fuel loading and improve Greater sage-grouse habitat by selectively thinning pinion-juniper from sagebrush communities. In all, the BLM would treat 4,500 to 7,000 acres of the 23,000-acre project area.

Kern Mountain Landscape Restoration Project: The Eastern Nevada Landscape Coalition (ENLC) has completed tree mastication on approximately 400 acres. Chaining and selective hand cutting of pinion and juniper was completed in September 2013. BLM aerial seeded the chaining and mastication areas in September 2013. Thinning of white fir from aspen was also completed in late September. The ENLC has treated approximately 1,300 acres of the approximately 15,000-acre project area located in the Kern Mountains. Hand thinning is ongoing throughout the winter with BLM fire crews. The project is scheduled for completion by April 2014.

Pioche and Caselton Wildland Urban Interface Project: The BLM has finished implementing all of the major project components. Some of the slash piles were burned in December 2013 and the remaining piles will be burned in spring or late fall 2014, as weather conditions allow. Approximately 3,240 acres of fuels reduction within the 11,300 acre project area was accomplished by thinning pinion-juniper via hand cutting and piling, chaining, mastication and seeding to provide for the habitat and protect the communities' residents from threat of catastrophic wildfire. The BLM began the project shortly after signing the Decision Record and Finding of No Significant Impact in July 2010. The project is funded through the fuels program and Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act.

Patterson Pass Sage Grouse Habitat Improvement Project: Lop and scatter thinning of pinion and juniper has stopped for the winter near Patterson Pass in Cave Valley. The contractor has completed approximately 3,500 acres of the nearly 4,800 acre thinning area. The project work will continue during summer 2014 with expected completion by October 2014. The project is the first implementation of the Cave and Lake Valley

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Watershed Restoration Plan. The project is funded through the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act, Health Land Initiative, Lincoln County Game Board, and the Mule Deer Foundation.

Jakes Valley Sagebrush Restoration Project: The project is on hold. The project is designed to improve or restore sagebrush communities, livestock and wildlife habitat, and watershed health while reducing fuel loading by restoring Wyoming sagebrush sites in and around Jakes Wash, 20 miles west of Ely, Nev. The BLM would restore land health by mowing up to 2,000 acres of the total project area, and thinning pinion and juniper across the project area, creating a mosaic that provides for wildlife edge areas. The BLM would seed about 60-percent of the treated area with a mix of perennial grasses and forbs.

Stonehouse Prescribed Burn: Weather conditions permitting, the BLM Ely District is scheduled between now and March 31, 2014, to burn about 500 acres of slash piles remaining from a pinion-juniper tree-thinning project near Lages Junction and Schellbourne Pass in the Schell Creek Range, about 70 miles north of Ely. To date, approximately 160 acres have been burned. Burning will continue as weather conditions allow. Residents and motorists traveling on U.S. Highway 93 can expect to see smoke from the prescribed burn and there will be an increase in fire vehicle traffic in the area. The Stonehouse Prescribed Burn is intended to reduce hazardous fuels accumulations to protect the watershed from potentially large, lethal wildfires; treat fuels to improve health and restore ecological stability, reduce or halt the encroachment of pinion-pine and Utah juniper trees to restore and promote wildlife habitat resiliency, and recycle nutrients and enhance species diversity of fire-adapted and fire-dependent vegetation.

Shingle Creek Aspen Restoration Project: The aspen restoration project is located on the west slope of the Snake Range, approximately 40 miles southeast of Ely, Nev., near the Great Basin National Park. The BLM plans to burn white fir slash piles in winter 2014-15, weather permitting. The goal of the project is to improve aspen health by removing competing conifers to promote aspen regeneration.

North Antelope Habitat Restoration: The project is located on the north end of the Antelope Range, approximately 70 miles northeast of Ely, Nev. The multi-year 12,000-acre habitat improvement project, which is nearly 60-percent complete, aims to improve sage-grouse and other wildlife habitat. Lop and scatter pinion-juniper thinning treatments have ceased for the winter, but will resume in summer and fall 2014. The BLM burned 330 acres of pinion-juniper slash piles in January 2014. The piles are a result of the previously completed North Antelope Stewardship Thinning.

Cold Springs Project: Pinion-juniper thinning is ongoing, time and funding permitting. The BLM completed approximately 80 acres of thinning during summer 2013, and sold nearly 100 cords of firewood from the project by competitive auction in September 2013. The BLM burned the remaining slash this winter. BLM expects to continue the project over the next three years through a contract where the contractor may have the option to utilize the firewood or make it available to the public. . The project goal is to provide a hazardous fuel break and demonstration area depicting various pinion-juniper thinning densities.

LANDS & REALTY

Medlin Modified Competitive Land Sale: The BLM Ely District, Caliente Field Office is scheduled at 1 p.m., Thursday, March 20, 2014, to offer for sale to the public through a modified competitive sale one 40-acre parcel of agency-administered public land located about 20 miles southeast of Rachel in Lincoln County, Nev. The oral auction will be conducted at the BLM Caliente Field Office, 1400 South Front Street, in Caliente. Bidding will begin at the appraised fair market value of \$19,000.

The parcel contains a 2.5-acre occupancy and residential lease issued in 1988 to Steve Medlin. Over the past 25 years, considerable disturbance has occurred beyond the 2.5 acre lease onto an adjacent 37.5-acre area, consisting of property items that belong to Medlin. In consideration of the historical uses of the parcel, to protect on-going uses, and to avoid dislocation of existing users, the BLM has identified Steve Medlin as the designated bidder for the sale of this parcel. The designated bidder has the option to meet the high bid. The person declared to have entered the highest qualifying oral bid shall submit payment by cash, personal check, bank draft, money order, or any combination for not less than one-fifth (20%) of the amount of the bid immediately following the close of the sale.

A parcel map delineating the proposed sale parcels is available for public review at: http://www.blm.gov/nv/st/en/fo/ely_field_office.html, at the BLM Caliente Field Office, 1400 South Front Street, in Caliente, Nev.; and BLM Ely District Office, 702 N. Industrial Way, in Ely.

Five percent of the proceeds from the proposed land sale would go to the Nevada State General Education Fund, 10 percent to Lincoln County, and the remainder deposited in a special account to be used for wilderness planning and natural resource protection, and recreation and other opportunities in Lincoln County.

Sacramento Pass Withdrawal Extension: The 90-day public comment period for a proposed 20-year extension of an existing withdrawal of 464.93 acres of public land for the Sacramento Pass Recreation Area closed on Jan. 27, 2014. If extended, the withdrawal would exclude the area from settlement, sale, location, or entry under the general land laws, including the United States mining laws. The extension is being proposed to continue the protection of the resource value and capital investment made by the BLM in developing and improving the area for outdoor recreation and for public health and safety.

The Sacramento Pass Recreation Area was initially withdrawn in 1994 for 20 years by Public Land Order No. 7060. That withdrawal will expire on June 2, 2014, unless a withdrawal extension is approved.

Lincoln County Land Disposals: The Ely District, Caliente Field Office is working with Lincoln County representatives to streamline land disposals to those that are most saleable. Disposal of public lands were identified in the Lincoln County Conservation,

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Recreation and Development Act as well as the White Pine County Conservation, Recreation and Development Act.

MINERALS

Active Mining Plans –

Gold Rock Mine Project: The BLM Ely District, Egan Field Office expects in early 2014 to have published in the Federal Register a Notice of Intent (NOI) extending the public input period an additional 30 days. The extension is necessary due to technical difficulties with the email system used to collect comments during the initial scoping period. The Midway Gold U.S. Inc. proposed Gold Rock Project would be located on BLM-administered lands approximately 50 miles west of Ely, in White Pine County, Nev., and consist of an open pit; a heap leach pad and associated ponds, process facility, and refinery; a mill; a carbon-in-leach plant; waste rock dumps; a tailings storage facility; water supply wells; haul roads; ancillary facilities; and a 69 kV transmission line. Electrical power would be obtained from Mt. Wheeler Power. For the Gold Rock Project, a 69-kV transmission line would be extended from the Pan Mine approximately 6 miles across the valley to tie into the west side of the Gold Rock Project electric system. Approximately 250 to 300 people would be employed during facility construction, and approximately 150 to 250 people would be employed during operations. The proposed project's total surface disturbance would be approximately 3,749 acres. The BLM has identified the following preliminary issues: cultural resources; socioeconomics; loss of habitat for wild horses and wildlife, including greater sage-grouse and mule deer; air quality; view shed areas; and loss of access to hunting areas.

Pan Mine Project: The BLM Ely District, Egan Field Office on Friday, Dec. 20, 2013, issued the Record of Decision for Midway Gold U.S., Inc.'s Pan Mine Project to be located in the Pancake Mountain Range in White Pine County, Nev., about 50 miles west of Ely or 22 miles southeast of Eureka. The decision allows the mining operator to construct and operate a new heap leach gold mine that would consist of two primary open pits, three satellite pits, one heap leach pad, three rock disposal areas and a transmission line. The total surface disturbance would be approximately 3,301 acres.

The BLM decision was to select the Southwest Power Line and Waste Rock Disposal Site Design alternatives with applicant-committed environmental protection measures and the mitigation measures specified in Sections 4.2 through 4.18 of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The Southwest Power Line Alternative was developed to avoid potential impacts to Greater Sage-Grouse from the Proposed Action power line. The Waste Rock Disposal Site Design Alternative would involve a conventional waste rock disposal design and move waste rock away from more important Greater Sage-Grouse habitat in order to minimize impacts.

An appeal and a petition for stay was filed by the Confederated Tribes of the Goshute Reservation on Jan. 21, 2014. The BLM filed their opposition to the petition for stay on Jan. 30, 2014.

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Bald Mountain Mine: The BLM is finalizing alternatives in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for a Barrick Gold US, Inc., proposal to expand the Bald Mountain Mine located in White Pine County, about 70 miles northwest of Ely and 30 miles northeast of Eureka, Nev. The DEIS is expected to be released for public review later this year. The proposal calls for the expansion of existing mine facilities in the North Operations Area Project, expansion of the existing Casino/Winrock Plan of Operations and incorporating it into the North Operations Area Project, and establishment of a South Operations Area Project that would encompass and expand the existing Yankee and Alligator Ridge mine sites. Expanding the North Operations Area Project and incorporating the Casino/Winrock Plan of Operations into the North Operations Area Project would increase the total surface disturbance from 9,124 acres to 13,704 acres and add four new heap leach pads. Establishing the South Operations Area Project would increase the total surface disturbance from 960 acres to 3,643 acres. The South Operation Area Project Plan of Operations would include an electrical transmission line and an access road between the North and South operations areas.

Hogum Mining District: Two small mine operators are mining for gold on the slopes of Hogum disturbing approximately 15 acres.

Notices and Exploration –

The Meadow Bay Gold Corporation Plan of Operation for Exploration Preliminary Environmental Assessment (EA) public comment period closed in early February 2014. Meadow Bay hopes to drill 69 exploratory holes in and around the Atlanta Mine site.

The preliminary environmental assessment (EA) analyzing impacts of Aurion Gold's intended exploration for gold at Logan Pass in the Mt. Irish Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) is out for public comment. The comment period ends March 10, 2014.

The BLM has reviewed the Preliminary environmental assessment (EA) for the Gold Springs Exploration Project (the public comment period closed Feb. 26, 2014). The Plan of Operations was submitted by Gold Springs, LLC (a subsidiary of High Desert Gold), on May 23, 2013. The plan proposes to disturb up to 100 acres. The proponent is currently conducting disturbance on two sites of 4.9 and 2.7 acres in the Gold Springs area.

The BLM in January 2014 authorized Midway Gold, U.S., to expand their gold exploration at the Gold Rock Project in southern Newark Valley. The decision allows Midway to increase its authorized exploration disturbance from 260 acres to up to 130 acres of public lands.

American Vanadium US Inc. has submitted to the BLM Battle Mountain District a Plan of Operations to mine vanadium for the Gibellini Mine in the Fish Creek (Mountain) Range. The Battle Mountain District is initiating the EIS process.

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Infrastructure Materials Corporation (IMC) withdrew their Blue Nose Peak Plan of Operations in December 2013. IMC was previously approved to conduct 88 acres of exploration of a limestone deposit at Blue Nose Peak, in southern Lincoln County. IMC is currently bonded for the 12.8 acres of existing disturbance and is no longer authorized for any new disturbance or activity.

Mineral Materials –

The Ely District sells mineral materials from 14 Community pits and through exclusive sale permits.

Oil & Gas Exploration/Development –

The BLM generated \$1,979,581 during its quarterly oil and gas competitive lease sale held in December 2013 in Reno, Nev., selling 54 parcels comprising 93,816 acres. The sale high bid of \$135,044 for a 2,548-acre parcel at \$53 per acre was made by Housing Int., LLC, of Belvedere, California, for a parcel in Nye County. The high bid per acre was \$54 by Contex Energy Co. for a 983.78-acre parcel in Nye County. The lease is for a period of 10 years with annual rentals of \$1.50 per acre for the first five years and \$2 an acre after that until production begins. Once a lease is producing, a royalty of 12.5 percent is charged. Half of the bid and rental receipts go to the state of Nevada. The BLM offered 178 parcels totaling 303,334 acres. Future Ely District oil & gas lease sales will be conducted in December.

The BLM Ely District, Egan Field Office in 2013 approved several applications to drill in the Railroad Valley area near U.S. Highway 6 and Green Springs Ranch. As allowed within the parameters of Makoil's Application for Permit to Drill (approved 11/14/12), the BLM Egan Field Manager approved a sundry notice that Makoil submitted in May 2013 to hydraulically fracture (frack) the Portuguese Mountain well, #14A-12. The signed sundry notice was accompanied by 14 Conditions of Approval. Back flush water is to be transported to a pre-existing disposal well near Tonopah, Nev., to be re-injected, depending on approval from the Nevada Department of Environmental Protection (NDEP).

NOXIOUS/INVASIVE WEED MANAGEMENT

The BLM Ely District is implementing the 2010 Integrated Weed Management Plan that provides for the inventory, treatment, and monitoring of non-native and noxious invasive weeds. The plan includes weed prevention procedures and treatment options, including herbicides, for use in and outside of Wilderness; as well as outreach and education measures. (Use of herbicides in threatened and endangered species habitat requires consultation.) The BLM works with private landowners, non-profit organizations and local, state and federal agencies through nine Cooperative Weed Management Areas (CWMAs). Three of the CWMAs receive Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act (SNPLMA) funding. They are the White River and Cave Valley, Steptoe and Butte Valley, and Snake Valley CWMAs.

RANGELAND MANAGEMENT

District staff continues to monitor and assess rangeland conditions associated with forage and water availability and coordinate with permittees regarding grazing management actions associated with drought conditions.

The field offices in January 2014 sent drought information letters to grazing permittees. The letters inform permittees about the abnormally dry conditions, in addition to providing an opportunity to plan for changes in the 2014 grazing season, if necessary.

Staff continues to fully process and renew term grazing permits (TPR), plan range improvement projects (riparian and spring developments, fences, and more), and process grazing applications and transfers. Links to documents are located on the BLM website at: https://www.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/nepa/nepa_register.do

RECREATION & TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PLANNING

Ash Springs Recreation Site: The BLM Ely District, Caliente Field Office on January 29, 2014, issued the Decision to close the Ash Springs Recreation Site. The Decision, which is to be published in the Federal Register, was issued in full force and effect and is under a 30 day appeal period.

The BLM in July 2013 temporarily closed the site, located adjacent to U.S. Highway 93 in Lincoln County, about 100 miles north of Las Vegas, Nev., due to extensive modification of the man-made pool by public users that is causing a threat to human safety and degrading habitat for endangered species. The popular recreation site is home to the endangered White River springfish, as well as several sensitive species that include the Pahranaagat pebblesnail, Pahranaagat naucorid bug and Grated tyronia.

The Ash Springs Temporary Closure Preliminary EA analyzed the potential impacts that could result from implementation of the proposed action and examined the need to ensure the protection and viability of natural resources and the public need for recreational opportunities.

The field office is gathering information about the possible future management options for the popular recreation site. Members of the public are invited to participate and can email their ideas and comments to the BLM at BLM_NV_Ash_Springs.gov.

Sacramento Pass Recreation Area: The Sacramento Pass Recreation Area will remain closed to the public until spring 2014 as improvements are made to improve visitor access and safety. The popular area, located alongside U.S. Highway 6/50, about 45 miles east of Ely, was closed on Monday, July 8. Improvements to the site include new campsite designs and furnishings, sun shelters and toilet facility, re-graded roadways and a reconstructed fishing pond that will feature an accessible fishing deck. The improved facilities will more closely comply with Americans with Disabilities Act requirements and be designed to be environmentally friendly, where practical.

Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Ely District Update

The recreation area was initially constructed in 1993 with federal highway funding obtained through the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A legacy for Users program. It is being reconstructed through Round 12 of the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act, or SNPLMA. The reconstruction is expected to cost about \$375,000.

Travel Management Planning: The BLM Ely District, Egan Field Office is preparing a plan for approximately 1,428,000 acres within the Huntington, Jakes, Long, Newark and Ruby valleys, in White Pine County. The BLM will release the draft plan for public comment.

WILD HORSES

The BLM has conducted aerial census flights in the Triple B, Seaman and White River herd areas, and Pancake Complex. There are no planned-for wild horse gathers at this time. However, Nevada is experiencing record drought. (*See Rangeland Management*)

WILDERNESS

Law enforcement patrols will be conducted in early March. These patrols will target illegal driving into wilderness that may occur during shed antler collection.

Wilderness Plans: The Draft Bristlecone and Goshute Canyon Wilderness Management Plan is expected to be available for public comment in early April 2014.

The BLM is drafting the Preliminary Becky Peak and Government Peak Wilderness Management Plan and Environmental Assessment. The public comment period is anticipated in early March 2014.

Lands with Wilderness Characteristics: The BLM is performing project by project inventory updates for Lands with Wilderness Character (e.g. Oil & Gas Lease Sale).

SPECIAL LEGISLATION

Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act (SNPLMA): The SNPLMA Partners Working Group (PWG) and Executive Committee (EC) in fall 2013 reviewed comments received from the public regarding preliminary recommendations for SNPLMA Round 14 expenditures and a proposed expenditure of Lincoln County Land Act (LCLA) funds for an environmentally-sensitive land acquisition in Elko County. The PWG and EC, in consultation with the Secretary of Agriculture, accepted the preliminary recommendation and forwarded it to the Secretary of the Interior for approval. The Secretary signed a Decision Memorandum on Nov. 12, 2013, approving \$8,731,949 in Round 14 funding. Round 15 will be open for nominations in September 2014. The Executive Committee includes the regional directors of the National Park Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service Regional Forester, and the BLM Nevada State Director.

Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Ely District Update

Two projects were approved in the BLM Ely District: 1) A Conservation Initiative project entitled *Environmentally Responsible Closure of Abandoned Mine Safety Hazards in Lincoln County* (\$400,000), and 2) an Eastern Nevada Landscape Restoration Project entitled *South Steptoe Valley Sagebrush Habitat Restoration* (\$588,000).

Lincoln County Archaeological Initiative (LCAI): The deadline to submit proposals for Round 7 of the Lincoln County Archaeological Initiative (LCAI) concluded on Friday, Feb. 28, 2014. Proposals under this initiative focus on the inventory, evaluation, protection and management of unique archaeological resources in Lincoln County.

Funding for LCAI comes from revenues generated through the sale of public lands identified for disposal in the Lincoln County Lands Act and existing land-use plans. The Act created a special account in which 85-percent of the revenues from land sales are deposited. Funds in the special account may be used for a number of activities, including the study of archaeological resources in Lincoln County. The remaining funds are distributed to the State of Nevada (5-percent) and Lincoln County (10-percent).

To date the BLM has approved \$6,115,992 for archaeological projects in Lincoln County. Expenditures approved include documenting Paiute and Shoshone rock art sites, and oral histories and practices; archaeological site inventories; obsidian toolstone research; settlement pattern studies; educational brochures and websites; and upgrade of archaeological collections by inventorying, re-marking and repackaging of artifacts collected from public lands in Lincoln County.

The LCAI Archaeological Resources Team (ART) is scheduled on March 21, 2014, to rank Round 7 proposals and develop a recommendation for funding. ART on April 10, 2014, will discuss Round 8 priorities.

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Contact Chris Hanefeld, BLM Ely District public affairs specialist, at (775) 289-1842 or chanefel@blm.gov for more information on these and other projects/programs in the BLM Ely District.